

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 04353 01 OF 02 161228Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 INR-07 NSC-05
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R 161107Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6730
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4353

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MO, IS
SUBJECT: SHAUL BEN-SIMHON COMMENTS ON HIS VISIT TO MOROCCO

REF: A. TEL AVIV 3815 (NOTAL)
B. RABAT 3165

SUMMARY: THE CHAIRMAN OF THE WORLD CONGRESS OF NORTH AFRICAN JEWS CONSIDERS HIS RECENT VISIT TO MOROCCO AS A BREAKTHROUGH. MOROCCAN OFFICIALS WITH WHOM HE MET TOLD HIM THAT KING HASSAN HOPES THAT MOROCCO WILL PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN CURRENT MOVES TOWARD MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS AND THAT CONTACTS BETWEEN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN MOROCCO AND ISRAEL WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THAT ROLE. END SUMMARY

1. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL ISRAELIS OF NORTH AFRICAN ORIGIN HAD PRECEDED HIM TO MOROCCO, BEN-SIMHON, CHAIRMAN OF THE WORLD CONGRESS OF NORTH AFRICAN JEWS AND A MEMBER OF THE HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE, CONSIDERED HIS VISIT AS SOMETHING OF A "BREAKTHROUGH." HE TOLD EMBOFF ON JUNE 15 THAT HIS VISIT HAD SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE BEING THE FIRST ONE TO AN ARAB COUNTRY BY A MEMBER OF THE "ISRAELI ESTABLISHMENT." OTHER RECENT VISITS BY
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04353 01 OF 02 161228Z

ISRAELI JOURNALISTS, ACADEMICS, MEMBERS OF THE RADICAL LEFT, OR NON-ZIONISTS LIKE NAHUM GOLDMANN COULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AS HAVING COMPARABLE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.

2. BEN-SIMHON EXPLAINED THAT WHILE HIS INVITATION HAD COME FROM THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, THE INITIATIVE FOR HIS HAVING BEEN INVITED HAD COME FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

HE SAID THAT HE WAS RECEIVED BY DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL CABINET AHMED BENSOUDA, FOREIGN MINISTER LARAKI, MINISTER OF INFORMATION AHMED BENHIMA, AND MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE MOHAMED ECHIGUER. IN ADDITION, HE HAD MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY WHO ACCORDED HIM A "TRIUMPHAL WELCOME."

3. COMMENTING ON HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH MOROCCAN OFFICIALS, BEN SIMHON SAID THAT DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH HE FORESAW FOR AN EARLY GENEVA CONFERENCE AND ATTENDANT PREPARATORY DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS, HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT THE "MOROCCAN CONNECTION" COULD PROVIDE A POTENTIALLY USEFUL CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN ISRAELI AND ARAB LEADERS. HE HAD ALREADY DISCUSSED HIS TRIP WITH PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE BEGIN, WHO HAD SHOWN KEEN INTEREST IN THE REPORT AND HAD INVITED BEN SIMHON FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS AFTER HE HAS FORMED HIS GOVERNMENT. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE PERSONAL FRIEND, THE REACTION OF THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ISRAEL HAS BEEN ALMOST UNIFORMLY FAVORABLE. BEN SIMHON IS NOW SPENDING MUCH OF HIS TIME DISCUSSING HIS TRIP WITH FELLOW NORTH AFRICAN COMMUNITY LEADERS.

4. THE MOROCCAN OFFICIALS WITH WHOM HE MET EXPLAINED THAT KING HASSAN IS CAREFULLY PREPARING A NEW INITIATIVE AIMED AT MAKING MOROCCO THE FIRST ARAB COUNTRY TO OPEN CONTACTS WITH ISRAEL AND THAT HE HOPES TO ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH THE TIES OF THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 04353 01 OF 02 161228Z

IN BOTH COUNTRIES AND IN FRANCE AND THE U.S. THE SUPPORT WHICH THE MOROCCAN PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN THE KING IN THE STRUGGLE TO REGAIN THE SPANISH SAHARA AND HIS INITIATIVES IN ZAIRE AND ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA AND THE RECONFIRMATION OF THE SUPPORT FOR THE MONARCHY BY THE LATEST ELECTION RESULTS HAVE STRENGTHENED THE KING'S CONFIDENCE THAT HE SHOULD RESUME A BOLD INITIATIVE ON BEHALF OF THE MODERATE ARAB CAMP IN THE CURRENT ROUND OF MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMACY. THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN GREATLY ENCOURAGED BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE AND FORESAW THE POSSIBILITY OF A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT ALONG THE LINES INDICATED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENTS ON A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND,

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04353 02 OF 02 161212Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4353

SECURE BORDERS AND A FINAL PEACE SETTLEMENT. ALTHOUGH THE KING WAS CONCERNED OVER THE IMPACT OF THE BEGIN VICTORY IN ISRAEL, HE HOPED TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARD KEEPING THE INITIATIVE ALIVE IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE RISK OF A DEADLOCK WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE THE ASCENDANCY OF THE REJECTIONIST ARAB CAMP. THEREFORE, HE SOUGHT AS A FIRST STEP TO HELP BREAK DOWN PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS SEPARATING JEWS FROM ARABS. THIS INITIATIVE HAD ALSO BEEN DISCUSSED WITH SAUDI CROWN PRINCE FAHD WHO WAS IN MOROCCO AT THE SAME TIME AS BEN-SIMHON.

5. IN DISCUSSING THE BEGIN VICTORY IN ISRAEL, BEN-SIMHON POINTED OUT TO HIS HOSTS THAT THIS HAD BEEN LARGELY THE RESULT OF THE GROWING FEAR OF ARAB INTENTIONS BY THE JEWISH POPULATION FROM ARAB COUNTRIES, WHICH NOW MADE UP ALMOST 60 PERCENT OF THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE. THEREFORE, IN ORDER TO INDUCE ISRAEL TOWARD GREATER FLEXIBILITY, THE ARAB COUNTRIES SHOULD OFFER SPECIAL AND CREDIBLE ASSURANCES TO THIS IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION. PROPAGANDA INVITING THESE JEWS TO RETURN TO THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN IS NOT ONLY FRUITLESS BUT COUNTERPRODUCTIVE, SINCE IT SIGNALS AN INTENTION TO ELIMINATE ISRAEL. THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 04353 02 OF 02 161212Z

MOROCCANS REPORTEDLY INDICATED THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND PROMISED TO ABANDON THIS CAMPAIGN, ALTHOUGH THEY REITERATED THAT LEGALLY ANY PERSON OF MOROCCAN BIRTH

WOULD BE REGARDED AS A MOROCCAN CITIZEN, REGARDLESS OF ANY OTHER CITIZENSHIP STATUS AND WOULD ALWAYS ENJOY THE RIGHT TO RETURN.

6. REGARDING MOROCCAN-JEWISH TIES, THE MOROCCANS ASKED BEN-SIMHON TO SUPPORT THE SPECIAL INITIATIVE TOWARD ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE WHICH THE KING IS TRYING TO UNDERTAKE AND TO PERSUADE THE JEWISH GROUPS OF NORTH AFRICAN ORIGIN OF THE KING'S SINCERITY. THEY POINTED TO RECENT PRESS INTERVIEWS IN WHICH THE KING HAD ALREADY STRESSED THE POSSIBILITY OF CLOSE JEWISH-ARAB REGIONAL COOPERATION. THEY ALSO OFFERED TO PERSUADE THE MORE MODERATE ARAB COUNTRIES, SUCH AS SAUDI ARABIA, JORDAN, KUWAIT, AND EGYPT, TO REMAIN OPEN MINDED IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE NEW BEGIN GOVERNMENT. BEN-SIMHON SAID THE MOROCCANS WERE LESS CERTAIN ABOUT SYRIA'S ROLE AND HAD EVOKED THE POSSIBILITY THAT ASSAD MAY PUSH THE PLO TOWARD A MORE HARDLINE POSTURE.

7. ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL, THE MOROCCANS PROPOSED THAT A MEETING OF THE WORLD CONGRESS OF NORTH AFRICAN JEWS BE HELD IN CASABLANCA IN FEBRUARY 1978. HOWEVER, BEN-SIMHON SUGGESTED A MORE INFORMAL MEETING. THE GOM HAD ASSURED HIM THAT THEY WOULD COOPERATE IN OPENING UP ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL SOURCES, AS YET NOT PROPERLY CATALOGUED, TO JEWISH SCHOLARS AND INDICATED THAT THEY WERE WILLING TO SEND MICROFILMS AND CATALOGUES OF AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS TO ISRAEL. THEY ALSO GAVE ASSURANCES OF THE CONTINUED PROTECTION OF JEWISH HOLY PLACES IN MOROCCO AND THE FREE ACCESS OF JEWS TO WORSHIP THERE.

8. BEN-SIMHON'S VISIT HAS RECEIVED WIDE-SPREAD PUBLICITY IN ISRAEL; ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS HAVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 04353 02 OF 02 161212Z

APPEARED IN ALL MAJOR NEWSPAPERS. HOWEVER, HE HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED NAMING HIS GOVERNMENT CONTACTS IN MOROCCO AND THE FACT THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED HIS TRIP WITH BEGIN. HE HAS ASKED THAT THIS INFORMATION BE HELD CLOSELY.
LEWIS

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